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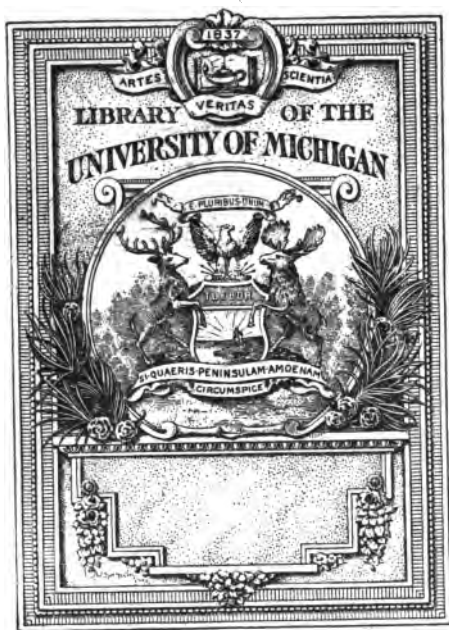
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A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY



PLAYS OF OSCAR WILDE



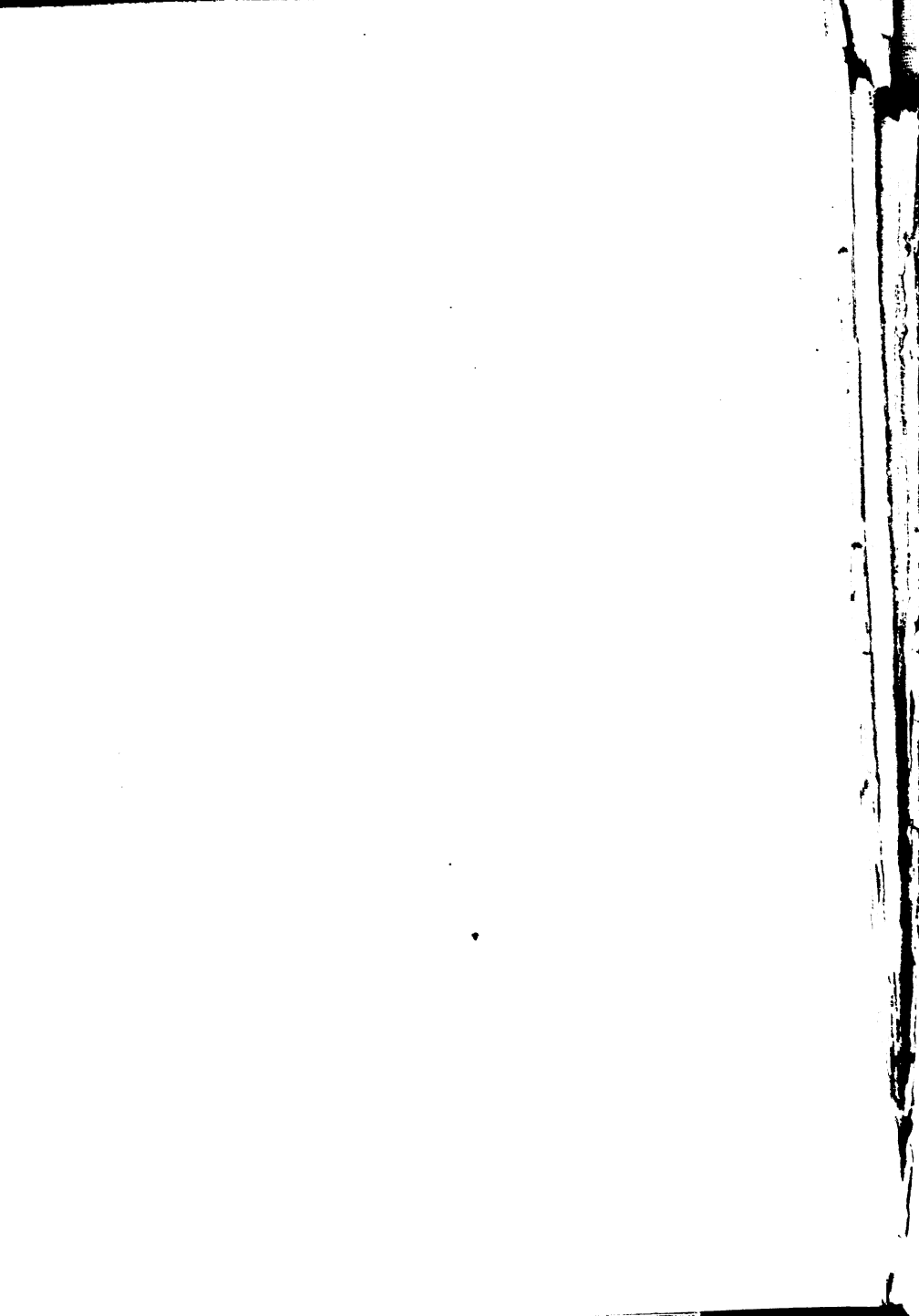
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**A FLORENTINE  
TRAGEDY**

**By  
OSCAR WILDE**

**OPENING SCENE  
BY STURGE MOORE**

**1908  
JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY  
BOSTON AND LONDON**



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WHEN Oscar Wilde was arrested at an Hotel in Sloane Street in April, 1895, he asked me to go to his house, 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, in order to secure his unpublished MSS. These consisted chiefly of "The Duchess of Padua," the enlarged version of "Mr. W. H." and "A Florentine Tragedy." On reaching the house I found that the door of his library had been locked. He subsequently wrote from Holloway Prison and again asked if I had found any of the MSS. Accompanied by another of his friends I obtained access to the room, but was unable to find the missing works. A remarkable feature of the case was that all the published MSS. were lying

▼

about in various fragmentary states, and it was perfectly obvious that someone familiar with the author's writing had been there before us. A few days later an execution was put into the house on a judgment obtained by a creditor, and this was followed by one of the most disgraceful auctions that ever occurred in London. Not many personal friends were present, as all the money they could afford was being devoted to his defence. Private letters and MSS. were dispersed, though I believe the sale of such things under the circumstances was illegal; and private collectors who were anxious to buy any of the pictures, works of art, or literary relics (of which Wilde possessed a certain number) were hustled by the dealers. An eye-witness informs me that he saw a great many small objects being pocketed by the crowd. For many years afterwards the second-hand shops were full of objects from the sale.

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Whether any of the three MSS. escaped my notice, and were included in the sale, of course I cannot say. "The Duchess of Padua" I possessed in a transcript, so the loss of the MS. was of no special consequence. I have been told, however, that all three MSS. are now in America, but I have never been able to hear anything definite or satisfactory on the subject. A few years afterwards I was looking over the papers and letters which I had succeeded in rescuing from Tite Street, and came across loose sheets of MS. and typewriting which I had imagined at the time were fragments of "The Duchess of Padua." On putting them together in a coherent form I immediately recognized that they belonged to the lost "Florentine Tragedy," or such portions of it as Wilde ever wrote. I assumed that the opening scene, though once extant, had disappeared. One day, however, I heard from Mr. Willard, the well

known actor, that he possessed a type-written fragment of a play which Wilde had submitted to him, and this he kindly forwarded for my inspection. It agreed in every particular with what I had taken so much trouble to put together. This suggests, conclusively I imagine, that Wilde had never written the opening scene, as Mr. Willard's version began where mine did. It was characteristic of the author to have finished what he never began.

When the Literary Theatre Society produced "Salome" in 1906 they asked me for some other short drama by Wilde to present at the same time, as "Salome" does not take very long to play. I offered them the fragment of "A Florentine Tragedy." By a fortunate coincidence, Mr. Thomas Sturge Moore, the poet and dramatist, happened to be on the committee of this Society, and to him was entrusted by my consent the task of

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writing an opening scene to make the play complete. It is not for me to criticise either his work or Wilde's, but I think I am justified in saying that Wilde himself would have envied, with an artist's envy, such lines as :

We will sup with the moon,  
Like Persian princes that in Babylon  
Sup in the hanging gardens of the King.

In a stylistic sense Mr. Sturge Moore has accomplished a feat in reconstruction, whatever opinions may be held of "A Florentine Tragedy" by Wilde's admirers or detractors. The achievement is particularly remarkable because Mr. Sturge Moore has nothing in common with Wilde other than what is shared by all real poets and dramatists. He is a landed proprietor on Parnassus, not a trespasser. In England we are more familiar with the poachers. Time and Death are of course necessary before

there can come any adequate recognition of one of our most original and gifted singers. But I may mention among his works "The Vinedresser and Other Poems" (1899), "Absalom" — A Chronicle Play (1903), "The Centaur's Booty" (1903). Mr. Sturge Moore is also an art critic of distinction, and his learned works on "Durer" (1905) and "Correggio" (1906) are more widely known (I am sorry to say) than his powerful and enthralling poems.

ROBERT ROSS.

**A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY**



**DRAMATIS PERSONÆ**

---

GUIDO BARDI . . . *A Florentine prince*  
SIMONE . . . . . *A merchant*  
BIANCA . . . . . *His wife*  
MARIA . . . . . *A tire-woman*

---

*The action takes place at Florence.*

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

*The scene represents a tapestried upper room giving on to a balcony or loggia in an old house at Florence. A table laid for a frugal meal, a spinning-wheel, distaff, etc., chests, chairs and stools.*

*As the Curtain Rises Enter Bianca,  
with her Servant, Maria.*

---

M A R I A

Certain and sure, the sprig is Guido  
Bardo,  
A lovely lord, a lord whose blood is blue !

B I A N C A

But where did he receive you ?

M A R I A

Where, but there  
In yonder palace, in a painted hall! —  
Painted with naked women on the walls,—  
Would make a common man or blush or  
smile  
But he seemed not to heed them, being a  
lord.

B I A N C A

But how know you 'tis not a chamber-  
layne,  
A lackey merely?

M A R I A

Why, how know I there is a God in  
heaven?  
Because the angels have a master surely.  
So to this lord they bowed, all others  
bowed,  
And swept the marble flags, doffing their  
caps,

With the gay plumes. Because he stiffly  
said,  
And seemed to see me as those folk are  
seen  
That will be never seen again by you,  
“Woman, your mistress then returns  
this purse  
Of forty thousand crowns, is it fifty  
thousand?  
Come name the sum will buy me grace of  
her.”

B I A N C A

What, were there forty thousand crowns  
therein?

M A R I A

I know it was all gold; heavy with gold.

B I A N C A

It must be he, none else could give so  
much.

M A R I A

'Tis he, 'tis my lord Guido, Guido Bardi.

B I A N C A

What said you?

M A R I A

I, I said my mistress never  
Looked at the gold, never opened the  
purse,  
Never counted a coin. But asked again  
What she had asked before, " How young  
you looked?  
How handsome your lordship looked?  
What doublet  
Your majesty had on? What chains,  
what hose  
Upon your revered legs?" And curtsyed  
I, . . . .

B I A N C A

What said he?

M A R I A

Curtseyed I, and he replied,  
“ Has she a lover then beside that old  
Soured husband or is it him she loves,  
my God!  
Is it him ? ”

B I A N C A

Well ?

M A R I A

Curtseyed I low and said  
“ Not him, my lord, nor you, nor no man  
else.  
Thou art rich, my lord, and honoured,  
my lord, and she  
Though not so rich is honoured . . . ”

B I A N C A

Fool, you fool,  
I never bid you say a word of that.

M A R I A

Nor did I say a word of that : you said,

I said, " She loves him not, my lord, nor  
loves  
Any man else. Yet she might like to  
love,  
If she were loved by one who pleased her  
well;  
For she is weary of spinning long alone.  
She is not rich and yet she is not poor;  
but young  
She is, my lord, and you are young.  
(*Pauses smiling.*)

B I A N C A

Quick, quick!

M A R I A

There, there! 'Twas but to show you  
how I smiled  
Saying the lord was young. It took him  
too;  
For he said, " This will do! If I should  
call  
To-night to pay respect unto your lovely—

Our lovely mistress, tell her that I said,  
Our lovely mistress, shall I be received ? ”  
And I said, “ Yes.” “ Then say I come  
and if  
All else is well let her throw down some  
favour,  
When as I pass below.” He should be  
there !  
Look from the balcony ; he should be  
there ! —  
And there he is, dost see ?

BIANCA

Some favour. Yes.  
This ribbon weighted by this brooch will  
do.  
Maria, be you busy near within, but, till  
I call take care you enter not. Go down  
And let the young lord in, for hark, he  
knocks.  
(*Exit Maria.*)



Great ladies might he choose from and  
yet he

Is drawn . . . ah, there my fear is!  
Was he drawn

By love to me — by love's young strength  
alone?

That's where it is, if I were sure he  
loved,

I then might do what greater dames have  
done

And vengeance on a husband blind to  
beauty.

But if! Ah if! he is a wandering bee,  
Mere gallant taster, who befools poor  
flowers . . .

*(Maria opens the door for Guido Bardi,  
and then withdraws.)*

My lord, I learn that we have something  
here,

In this poor house, which thou dost wish  
to buy.

My husband is from home, but my poor  
fate

Has made me perfect in the price of  
velvets,  
Of silks and gay brocades. I think you  
offered  
Some forty thousand crowns, or fifty  
thousand,  
For something we have here? And it  
must be  
That wonder of the loom, which my  
Simone  
Has lately home; it is a Lucca damask,  
The web is silver over-wrought with roses.  
Since you did offer fifty thousand crowns  
It must be that. Pray wait for I will  
fetch it.

GUIDO

Nay, nay, thou gracious wonder of a  
loom  
More cunning far than those of Lucca, I  
Had in my thought no damask silver  
cloth  
By hunch-back weavers woven toilsomely.



If such are priced at fifty thousand crowns  
It shames me, for I hoped to buy a fabric  
For which a hundred thousand then were  
little.

B I A N C A

A hundred thousand was it that you said?  
Nay, poor Simone for so great a sum  
Would sell you everything the house  
contains.

The thought of such a sum doth daze the  
brains

Of merchant folk who live such lives as  
ours.

G U I D O

Would he sell everything this house  
contains?

And everyone, would he sell everyone?

B I A N C A

Oh, everything and everyone, my lord.  
Unless it were himself; he values not

M. H. U.

A woman as a velvet, or a wife  
At half the price of silver-threaded woof.

G U I D O

Then I would strike a bargain with him  
straight.

B I A N C A

He is from home; may be will sleep  
from home;  
But I, my lord, can show you all we  
have;  
Can measure ells and sum their price,  
my lord.

G U I D O

It is thyself, Bianca, I would buy.

B I A N C A

O, then, my lord, it must be with Simone  
You strike your bargain; for to sell  
myself  
Would be to do what I most truly loathe.

Good-night, my lord; it is with deep  
regret  
I find myself unable to oblige  
Your lordship.

G U I D O

Nay, I pray thee let me stay  
And pardon me the sorry part I played,  
As though I were a chapman and intent  
To lower prices, cheapen honest wares.

B I A N C A

My lord, there is no reason you should  
stay.

G U I D O

Thou art my reason, peerless, perfect,  
thou,  
The reason I am here and my life's goal,  
For I was born to love the fairest  
things . . .

B I A N C A

To buy the fairest things that can be  
bought.

G U I D O

Cruel Bianca! Cover me with scorn,  
I answer born to love thy priceless self,  
That never to a market could be brought,  
No more than winged souls that sail and  
soar  
Among the planets or about the moon.

B I A N C A

It is so much thy habit to buy love,  
Or that which is for sale and labelled  
love,  
Hardly couldst thou conceive of priceless  
love.  
But though my love has never been for  
sale  
I have been in a market bought and  
sold.

G U I D O

This is some riddle which thy sweet wit  
reads  
To baffle mine and mock me yet again.

B I A N C A

My marriage, sir, I speak of marriage  
now,  
That common market where my husband  
went  
And prides himself he made a bargain  
then.

G U I D O

The wretched chapman, how I hate his  
soul.

B I A N C A

He was a better bidder than thyself,  
And knew with whom to deal . . . he  
did not speak  
Of gold to me, but in my father's ear  
He made it clink: to me he spoke of love.  
Honest and free and open without price,

G U I D O

O white Bianca, lovely as the moon,  
The light of thy pure soul and shining  
wit

Shows me my shame, and makes the  
thing I was  
Slink like a shadow from the thing I am.

B I A N C A

Let that which casts the shadow act, my  
lord,  
And waste no thought on what its shadow  
does  
Or has done. Are youth, and strength,  
and love  
Balked by mere shadows, so that they  
forget  
Themselves so far they cannot be recalled ?

G U I D O

Nobility is here, not in the court.  
There are the tinsel stars, here is the  
moon,  
Whose tranquil splendour makes a day  
of night.  
I have been starved by ladies, specks of  
light,



And glory drowns me now I see the  
moon.

B I A N C A

I have refused round sums of solid gold  
And shall not be by tinsel phrases bought.

G U I D O

Dispute no more, witty, divine Bianca;  
Dispute no more. See I have brought  
my lute!

Close lock the door. We will sup with  
the moon

Like Persian princes, that, in Babylon  
Sup in the hanging gardens of the king.  
I know an air that can suspend the soul  
As high in heaven as those towered-  
gardens hang.

B I A N C A

My husband may return, we are not  
safe.

GUIDO

Didst thou not say that he would sleep  
from home?

BIANCA

He was not sure, he said it might be so.  
He was not sure — and he would send  
my aunt  
To sleep with me, if he did so decide,  
And she has not yet come.

GUIDO (*Starting*)

Hark, what's that?  
(*They listen, the sound of Maria's voice  
in anger with some one is faintly heard.*)

BIANCA

It is Maria scolds some gossip crone.

GUIDO

I thought the other voice had been a  
man's.

B I A N C A

All still again, old crones are often gruff.  
You should be gone, my lord.

G U I D O

O, sweet Bianca!  
How can I leave thee now! Thy beauty  
made  
Two captives of my eyes, and they were  
mad  
To feast them on thy form, but now thy  
wit,  
The liberated perfume of a bud,  
Which while a bud seemed perfect, but  
now is  
That which can make its former self  
forgot:  
How can I leave the flower who loved the  
leaf?  
Till now I was the richest prince in  
Florence,  
I am a lover now would shun its throngs,  
And put away all state and seek retreat

At Bellosguardo or Fiesole,  
Where roses in their fin'st profusion hide  
Some marble villa whose cool walls have  
rung

A laughing echo to Decameron,  
And where thy laughter shall as gaily  
sound.

Say thou canst love or with a silent kiss  
Instil that balmy knowledge on my soul.

B I A N C A

Canst tell me what love is ?

G U I D O

It is consent.

The union of two minds, two souls, two  
hearts,

In all they think and hope, and feel.

B I A N C A

Such lovers might as well be dumb, for  
those

Who think and hope and feel alike can  
never  
Have anything for one another's ear.

G U I D O

Love is? Love is the meeting of two  
worlds  
In never ending change and counter  
change.

B I A N C A

Thus will my husband praise the mercer's  
mart,  
Where the two worlds of East and West  
exchange.

G U I D O

Come. Love is love, a kiss a close  
embrace.  
It is . . .

B I A N C A

My husband calls that love  
When he hath slammed his weekly ledger  
to.

G U I D O

I find my wit no better match for thine  
Than thou art match for an old crabbed  
man;  
But I am sure my youth and strength  
and blood  
Keep better tune with beauty gay, and  
bright,  
As thine is, than lean age and miser toil.

B I A N C A

Well said, well said, I think he would not  
dare  
To face thee, more than owls dare face  
the sun;  
He's the bent shadow such a form as thine  
Might cast upon a dung heap by the  
road,  
Though should it fall upon a proper floor  
'Twould be at once a better man than  
he.

G U I D O

Your merchant living in the dread of loss

Becomes perforce a coward, eats his heart.  
Dull souls they are, who, like caged  
    prisoners, watch  
And envy others joy; they taste no food  
But what its cost is present to their  
    thought.

B I A N C A

I am my father's daughter, in his eyes  
A home-bred girl who has been taught to  
    spin.  
He never seems to think I have a face  
Which makes you gallants turn where'er  
    I pass.

G U I D O

Thy night is darker than I dreamed,  
    bright Star.

B I A N C A

He waits, stands by, and mutters to  
    himself,  
And never enters with a frank address  
To any company. His eyes meet mine

And with a shudder I am sure he counts  
The cost of what I wear.

GUIDO

Forget him quite.  
Come, come, escape from out this dismal  
life,  
As a bright butterfly breaks spider's web,  
And nest with me among those rosy  
bowers,  
Where we will love, as though the lives  
we led  
Till yesterday were ghoulish dreams dis-  
persed  
By the great dawn of limpid joyous life.

BIANCA

Will I not come?

GUIDO

O, make no question, come.  
They waste their time who ponder o'er  
bad dreams.



We will away to hills, red roses clothe,  
And though the persons who did haunt  
that dream

Live on, they shall by distance dwindled,  
seem

No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,  
That cowers at the passing of a bird,  
And silent shall they seem, out of ear-  
shot,

Those voices that could jar, while we  
gaze back

From rosy caves upon the hill-brow open,  
And ask ourselves if what we see is not  
A picture merely, — if dusty, dingy lives  
Continue there to choke themselves with  
malice.

Wilt thou not come, Bianca? Wilt thou  
not?

*(A sound on the stair.)*

GUIDO

What's that?

*(The door opens, they separate guiltily,  
and the husband enters.)*

HERE BEGINS  
THE PLAY BY  
OSCAR WILDE

SIMONE

My good wife, you come slowly, were it  
not better

To run to meet your lord? Here, take  
my cloak.

Take this pack first. 'Tis heavy. I have  
sold nothing:

Save a furred robe unto the Cardinal's  
son,

Who hopes to wear it when his father  
dies,

And hopes that will be soon.

But who is this?

Why, you have here some friend. Some  
kinsman doubtless,

Newly returned from foreign lands and  
fallen

Upon a house without a host to greet him.

I crave your pardon, kinsman. For a  
house

Lacking a host is but an empty thing  
And void of honour; a cup without its  
    wine,  
A scabbard without steel to keep it  
    straight,  
A flowerless garden widowed of the sun.  
Again I crave your pardon, my sweet  
    cousin.

B I A N C A

This is no kinsman and no cousin neither.

S I M O N E

No kinsman, and no cousin! You amaze  
    me.  
Who is it then who with such courtly  
    grace  
Deigns to accept our hospitalities?

G U I D O

My name is Guido Bardi.

S I M O N E

What! The son  
Of that great Lord of Florence whose dim  
towers  
Like shadows silvered by the wandering  
moon  
I see from out my casement every night!  
Sir Guido Bardi, you are welcome here,  
Twice welcome. But I trust my honest  
wife  
Hath not with foolish chatterings wearied  
you,  
As is the wont of women.

G U I D O

Your gracious lady,  
Whose beauty is a lamp that pales the  
stars  
And robs Diana's quiver of her beams,  
Has welcomed me with such sweet  
courtesies  
That if it be her pleasure, and your own,  
I will come often to your simple house.

And when your business bids you walk  
abroad

I will sit here and charm her loneliness  
Lest she might sorrow for you overmuch.  
What say you, good Simone ?

## S I M O N E

My noble lord,  
You bring me such high honour that my  
tongue  
Like a slave's tongue is tied, and cannot  
say  
The word it would. Yet not to give you  
thanks  
Were to be too unmannerly. So, I thank  
you,  
From my heart's core.

It is such things as these  
That knit a state together, when a Prince  
So nobly born and of such fair address,  
Forgetting unjust Fortune's differences,  
Comes to an honest burgher's honest home  
As a most honest friend.

And yet, my lord,  
I fear I am too bold. Some other night  
We trust that you will come here as a  
friend,  
To-night you come to buy my merchan-  
dise.  
Is it not so? Silks, velvets, what you will,  
I doubt not but I have some dainty wares  
Will woo your fancy. True, the hour is  
late,  
But we poor merchants toil both night  
and day  
To make our scanty gains. The tolls are  
high,  
And every city levies its own toll,  
And prentices are unskilful, and wives  
even  
Lack sense and cunning, though Bianca  
here  
Has brought me a rich customer to-night.  
Is it not so, Bianca? But I waste time.  
Where is my pack? Where is my pack,  
I say?

Open it, my good wife. Unloose the cords.  
Kneel down upon the floor. You are  
better so.

Nay, not that one, the other. Despatch,  
despatch.

Buyers will grow impatient oftentimes.  
We dare not keep them waiting. Ay!  
'tis that,

Give it to me; with care. It is most  
costly.

Touch it with care. And now, my noble  
lord,

G U I D O

Nay, I protest; trouble yourselves no  
farther,

There is no urgency in my desire  
To choose among your silken fabrics. —

Nay,  
Another time, another day will do.

S I M O N E

Nay, pardon — I have here a Lucca  
damask,

The very web of silver, and the roses  
So cunningly wrought that they lack  
perfume merely

To cheat the wanton sense. Touch it,  
my lord.

Is it not soft as water, strong as steel?  
And then the roses! Are they not finely  
woven?

I think the hillsides that best love the  
rose,

At Bellosguardo or at Fiesole,  
Throw no such blossoms on the lap of  
Spring.

Or if they do their blossoms droop and  
die.

Such is the fate of all the dainty things  
That dance in wind or water. Nature  
herself

Makes war on her own loveliness and  
slays

Her children like Medea. Nay, but, my  
lord,

Look closer still. Why, in this damask  
here



It is summer always, and no winter's  
tooth  
Will ever blight these blossoms. For every  
ell  
I paid a piece of gold. Red gold, and  
good,  
The fruit of careful thrift.

G U I D O

Honest Simone,  
Enough, I pray you. I am well content.  
To-morrow I will send my servant to you,  
Who will pay twice your price.

S I M O N E

My generous Prince!  
I kiss your hands. And now I do re-  
member  
Another treasure hidden in my house  
Which you must see. It is a robe of  
state,  
Woven by a Venetian, the stuff, cut-  
velvet;

The pattern, pomegranates: each separate seed  
Wrought of a pearl; the collar all of pearls,  
As thick as moths in summer streets at night,  
And whiter than the moons that madmen see  
Through prison bars at morning. A male ruby  
Burns like a lighted coal within the clasp.  
The Holy Father has not such a stone,  
Nor could the Indies show a brother to it.  
The brooch itself is of most curious art.  
Cellini never made a fairer thing  
To please the great Lorenzo. You must wear it.  
There is none worthier in our city here.  
And it will suit you well. Upon one side  
A slim and horned satyr leaps in gold  
To catch some nymph of silver. Upon the other  
Stands Silence with a crystal in her hand,

No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,  
That wavers at the passing of a bird ;  
And yet so cunningly wrought that one  
would say

It breathed, or held its breath.

Worthy Bianca,  
Would not this noble and most costly robe  
Suit young Lord Guido well ?

Nay, but entreat him ;  
He will refuse you nothing, though the  
price

Be as a prince's ransom. And your profit  
Shall not be less than mine.

B I A N C A

Am I your prentice ?  
Why should I chaffer for your velvet robe ?

G U I D O

Nay, fair Bianca, I will buy the robe.  
And all things that the honest merchant  
has

I will buy also. Princes must be ransomed,  
And fortunate are all high lords who fall  
Into the white hands of so fair a foe.

S I M O N E .

I stand rebuked. But you will buy my  
wares?  
Will you not buy them? Fifty thousand  
crowns  
Would scarce repay me. But you, my  
lord, shall have them  
For forty thousand. Is that price too  
high?  
Name your own price. I have a curious  
fancy  
To see you in this wonder of the loom  
Amidst the noble ladies of the court,  
A flower among flowers.  
They say, my lord,  
These highborn dames do so affect your  
Grace

That where you go they throng like flies  
around you,  
Each seeking for your favour.

I have heard also  
Of husbands that wear horns, and wear  
them bravely,  
As being of the fashion of the time,  
A fashion most fantastical.

## G U I D O

Simone,  
Your reckless tongue needs curbing; and  
besides,  
You do forget this gracious lady here  
Whose delicate ears are surely not attuned  
To such coarse music.

## S I M O N E

True: I had forgotten,  
Nor will offend again. Yet, my sweet  
Lord,  
You'll buy the robe of state. Will you  
not buy it?

But forty thousand crowns. 'Tis but a  
trifle,  
To one who is Giovanni Bardi's heir.

G U I D O

Settle this thing to-morrow with my  
steward,  
Antonio Costa. He will come to you.  
And you shall have a hundred thousand  
crowns  
If that will serve your purpose.

S I M O N E

A hundred thousand!  
Said you a hundred thousand? Oh! be  
sure  
That will for all time, and in everything  
Make me your debtor. Ay! from this  
time forth  
My house, with everything my house  
contains,  
Is yours, and only yours.  
A hundred thousand!

My brain is dazed. I will be richer far  
Than all the other merchants. I will buy  
Vineyards, and lands, and gardens. Every  
loom

From Milan down to Sicily shall be mine,  
And mine the pearls that the Arabian  
seas

Store in their silent caverns.

Generous Prince,  
This night shall prove the herald of my  
love,

Which is so great that whatso'er you ask  
It will not be denied you.

G U I D O

What if I asked  
For white Bianca here?

S I M O N E

You jest, my Lord,  
She is not worthy of so great a Prince.  
She is but made to keep the house and  
spin.

Is it not so, good wife? It is so. Look!  
Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and  
spin.

Women should not be idle in their homes.  
For idle fingers make a thoughtless heart.  
Sit down, I say.

B I A N C A

What shall I spin?

S I M O N E

Oh! spin

Some robe which, dyed in purple, sorrow  
might wear

For her own comforting: or some long-  
fringed cloth

In which a new-born and unwelcome babe  
Might wail unheeded; or a dainty sheet  
Which, delicately perfumed with sweet  
herbs,

Might serve to wrap a dead man. Spin  
what you will,

I care not, I.



## B I A N C A

The brittle thread is broken,  
The dull wheel wearies of its ceaseless  
round,  
The duller distaff sickens of its load;  
I will not spin to-night.

## S I M O N E

It matters not.  
To-morrow you shall spin, and every  
day  
Shall find you at your distaff. So Lucretia  
Was found by Tarquin. So, perchance,  
Lucretia  
Waited for Tarquin. Who knows? I  
have heard  
Strange things about men's wives. And  
now, my Lord,  
What news abroad? I heard to-day at  
Pisa  
That certain of the English merchants  
there  
Would sell their woollens at a lower rate

Than the just laws allow, and have  
entreated

The Signory to hear them.

Is this well?

Should merchant be to merchant as a  
wolf?

And should the stranger living in our  
land

Seek by enforced privilege or craft

To rob us of our profits?

GUIDO

What should I do

In such a matter? Tell me. Shall I  
go

And wrangle with the Signory on your  
count?

And wear the gown in which you buy from  
fools?

Or sell to sillier bidders? Honest Simone,  
Wool-selling or wool-gathering is for  
you,

My wits have other quarries.

## B I A N C A

Noble Lord,  
I pray you pardon my good husband  
here,  
His soul stands ever in the market-place,  
And his heart beats but at the price of  
wool.  
Yet he is honest in his common way.  
(*To Simone*)  
And you, have you no shame? A gracious  
Prince  
Comes to our house, and you must weary  
him  
With most misplaced assurance. Ask  
his pardon.

## S I M O N E

I ask it humbly. We will talk to-night  
Of other things. I hear the Holy Father  
Has sent a letter to the King of France  
Bidding him cross that shield of snow, the  
Alps,  
And make a peace in Italy, which will be

Worse than a war of brothers, and more  
bloody  
Than civil rapine or intestine feuds.

GUIDO

Oh! we are weary of that King of France,  
Who never comes, but ever talks of  
coming.

What are these things to me? There are  
other things  
Closer and of more import, good Simone.

BIANCA (*to Simone*)

I think you tire our most gracious guest.  
What is the King of France to us? As  
much  
As are your English merchants with their  
wool.

SIMONE

Is it so then? Is all this mighty world  
Narrowed into the confines of this room  
With but three souls for poor inhabitants?



Ay! there are times when the great  
universe,

Like cloth in some unskilful dyer's vat,  
Shrivels into a handsbreadth, and per-  
chance

That time is now? Well! let that time  
be now,

Let this mean room be as that mighty  
stage

Whereon kings die, and our ignoble lives  
Become the stakes God plays for.

I do not know

Why I speak thus. My ride has wearied  
me,

And my horse stumbled thrice, which is  
an omen

That bodes not good to any.

Alas! my lord,

How poor a bargain is this life of man,

And in how mean a market are we  
sold!

When we are born our mothers weep, but  
when

When

We die there is none weep for us. No,  
not one.

*(Passes to back of stage.)*

B I A N C A

How like a common chapman does he  
speak!

I hate him, soul and body. Cowardice  
Has set her pale seal on his brow. His  
hands,

Whiter than poplar leaves in windy  
springs,

Shake with some palsy; and his stammer-  
ing mouth

Blurts out a foolish froth of empty words  
Like water from a conduit.

G U I D O

Sweet Bianca,

He is not worthy of your thought or mine.

The man is but a very honest knave

Full of fine phrases for life's merchan-  
dise,

Selling most dear what he must hold most  
cheap,  
A windy brawler in a world of words.  
I never met so eloquent a fool.

## B I A N C A

Oh would that Death might take him  
where he stands.

S I M O N E (*turning round*)

Who spake of Death? Let no one speak  
of Death.  
What should Death do in such a merry  
house,  
With but a wife, a husband, and a friend  
To give it greeting? Let Death go to  
houses  
Where there are vile adulterous things,  
chaste wives  
Who growing weary of their noble lords  
Draw back the curtains of their marriage  
beds,  
And in polluted and dishonoured sheets

Feed some unlawful lust. Ay! 'tis so  
Strange, and yet so. *You* do not know  
the world.

*You* are too single and too honourable.  
I know it well. And would it were not so,  
But wisdom comes with winters. My  
hair grows grey,  
And youth has left my body. Enough of  
that.

To-night is ripe for pleasure, and indeed,  
I would be merry, as beseems a host  
Who finds a gracious and unlooked for  
guest

Waiting to greet him.

But what is this, my lord?  
Why, you have brought a lute to play to us.  
Oh! play, sweet Prince. And, if I am  
too bold,  
Pardon, but play.

G U I D O

I will not play to-night.  
Some other night, Simone.



(*To Bianca*)                      You and I  
Together, with no listeners but the stars,  
Or the more jealous moon.

## S I M O N E

Nay, but, my lord!  
Nay, but I do beseech you. For I have  
heard  
That by the simple fingering of a string,  
Or delicate breath breathed along hol-  
lowed reeds,  
Or blown into cold mouths of cunning  
bronze,  
Those who are curious in this art can  
draw  
Poor souls from prison houses. I have  
heard also  
How such strange magic lurks within  
these shells  
That at their bidding casements open  
wide,  
And Innocence puts vine leaves in her  
hair,

And wantons like a maenad. Let that  
pass.

Your lute, I know, is chaste. And there-  
fore play :

Ravish my ears with some sweet melody.  
My soul is in a prison house, and needs  
Music to cure its madness. Good Bianca,  
Entreat our guest to play.

B I A N C A

Be not afraid.  
Our well loved guest will choose his place  
and moment ;  
That moment is not now. You weary him  
With your uncouth insistence.

G U I D O

Honest Simone,  
Some other night. To-night I am content  
With the low music of Bianca's voice,  
Who, when she speaks, charms the too  
amorous air,

And makes the reeling earth stand still,  
 or fix  
 His cycle round her beauty.

## S I M O N E

You flatter her.

She has her virtues as most women have.  
 But beauty is a gem she may not wear.  
 It is better so, perchance.

Well, my dear lord,

If you will not draw melodies from your  
 lute  
 To charm my moody and o'er troubled  
 soul,  
 You'll drink with me at least?

Your place is laid.

(*Sees table.*)  
 Fetch me a stool, Bianca. Close the  
 shutters.  
 Set the great bar across. I would not  
 have  
 The curious world with its small prying  
 eyes  
 To peer upon our pleasure.

Now, my lord,  
Give us a toast from a full brimming cup.

*(He pours out two glasses of wine, the bottle visibly shaking in his hand and when Guido lifts his glass a stain is left on the cloth by the wet foot of the glass; seeing which Simone starts back and sets down his own glass without tasting it.)*

What is this stain upon the cloth? It looks  
As purple as a wound upon Christ's side.  
Wine merely is it? I have heard it said  
When wine is spilt blood is spilt also,  
But that's a foolish tale.

My lord, I trust  
My grape is to your liking? The wine of  
Naples  
Is fiery like its mountains. Our Tuscan  
vineyards  
Yield a more wholesome juice.

G U I D O

I like it well,

Honest Simone; and, with your good  
leave,

Will toast the fair Bianca when her lips  
Have like red rose-leaves floated on this  
cup

And left its vintage sweeter. Taste,  
Bianca.

*(Bianca drinks.)*

Oh! all the honey of Hyblean bees,  
Matched with this draught were bitter!

Good Simone,  
You do not share the feast.

S I M O N E

It is strange, my lord,  
I cannot eat or drink with you, to-night.  
Some humour, or some fever in my blood,  
At other seasons temperate, or some  
thought

That like an adder creeps from point to  
point,

That like a madman crawls from cell to  
cell,

Poisons my palate and makes appetite  
A loathing not a longing. (*Goes aside.*)

G U I D O

Sweet Bianca,  
This common chapman wearies us with  
words.  
I must go hence. To-morrow I will come.  
Tell me the hour.

B I A N C A

Come with the youngest dawn!  
Until I see you all my life is vain.

G U I D O

Ah! loose the falling midnight of your  
hair,  
And in those stars, your eyes, let me behold  
Mine image, as in mirrors. Dear Bianca,  
Though it be but a shadow, keep me  
there,  
Nor gaze at anything that does not show

Some symbol of my semblance. I am  
jealous  
Of what your vision feasts on.

## B I A N C A

Oh! be sure  
Your image will be with me always.  
Dear,  
Love can translate the very meanest thing  
Into a sign of sweet remembrances.  
But come before the lark with its shrill  
song  
Has waked a world of dreamers. I will  
stand  
Upon the balcony there.

## G U I D O

And by a ladder  
Wrought out of scarlet silk and sewn with  
pearls  
Will come to meet me.  
White foot after foot,  
Like snow upon a rose tree.

BIANCA

As you will.  
You know that I am yours for love or  
death.

GUIDO

Simone, I must go to mine house.

SIMONE

So soon? Why should you? the great  
Duomo's bell  
Has not yet tolled its midnight, and the  
watchmen  
Who with their hollow horns mock the  
pale moon  
Lie drowsy in their towers. Stay a while.  
I fear we may not see you here again,  
And that fear saddens my too simple  
heart.

GUIDO

Be not afraid, Simone. I will stand  
Most constant in my friendship. But  
to-night



I go to mine own home, and that at once.  
To-morrow, sweet Bianca.

S I M O N E

Well, well, so be it.  
I would have wished for fuller converse  
with you,  
My new found friend, my honourable  
guest,  
But that it seems may not be.

And besides  
I do not doubt your father waits for you,  
Wearying for voice or footstep. You, I  
think,  
Are his one child? He has no other  
child.

You are the gracious pillar of his house,  
The flower of a garden full of weeds.  
Your father's nephews do not love him  
well.

So run folks' tongues in Florence. I  
meant but that;  
Men say they envy your inheritance

---

And look upon your vineyard with fierce  
eyes

As Ahab looked on Naboth's goodly field.  
But that is but the chatter of a town  
Where women talk too much.

Good night, my lord.

Fetch a pine torch, Bianca. The old  
staircase

Is full of pitfalls, and the churlish moon  
Grows, like a miser, niggard of her  
beams,

And hides her face behind a muslin mask  
As harlots do when they go forth to snare  
Some wretched soul in sin. Now, I will  
get

Your cloak and sword. Nay, pardon, my  
good lord.

It is but meet that I should wait on you  
Who hast so honoured my poor burgher's  
house,

Drunk of my wine, and broken bread,  
and made

Yourself a sweet familiar. Oftentimes

My wife and I will talk of this fair night  
And its great issues.

Why, what a sword is this !  
Ferrara's temper, pliant as a snake,  
And deadlier, I doubt not. With such  
steel

One need fear nothing in the moil of life.  
I never touched so delicate a blade.  
I have a sword too, somewhat rusted  
now.

We men of peace are taught humility,  
And to bear many burdens on our backs,  
And not to murmur at an unjust world,  
And to endure unjust indignities.  
We are taught that, and like the patient  
Jew

Find profit in our pain.

Yet I remember  
How once upon the road to Padua  
A robber sought to take my pack horse  
from me,  
I slit his throat and left him. I can bear  
Dishonour, public insult, many shames,

Shrill scorn, and open contumely, but he  
Who filches from me something that is  
mine,  
Ay! though it be the meanest trencher-  
plate  
From which I feed mine appetite — oh!  
he  
Perils his soul and body in the theft  
And dies for his small sin. From what  
strange clay  
We men are moulded!

G U I D O

Why do you speak like this?

S I M O N E

I wonder, my Lord Guido, if my sword  
Is better tempered than this steel of yours.  
Shall we make trial? Or is my state too  
low  
For you to cross your rapier against mine,  
In jest, or earnest?

## GUIDO

Naught would please me better,  
Than to stand fronting you with naked  
blade

In jest or earnest. Give me mine own  
sword.

Fetch yours. To-night will settle the  
great issue

Whether the Prince's or the Merchant's  
steel

Is better tempered. Was not that your  
word?

Fetch your own sword. Why do you  
tarry, Sir?

## SIMONE

My lord, of all the gracious courtesies  
That you have showered on my barren  
house

This is the highest.

Bianca, fetch my sword.

Thrust back that stool and table. We  
must have

An open circle for our match at arms.  
And good Bianca here shall hold the torch  
Lest what is but a jest grow serious.

BIANCA (*to Guido*)

Oh! kill him, kill him!

SIMONE

Hold the torch, Bianca.

(*They begin to fight.*)

SIMONE

Have at you! Ah! Ha! would you?

(*He is wounded by Guido.*)

A scratch, no more. The torch was in  
mine eyes.

Do not look sad, Bianca. It is nothing.  
Your husband bleeds, 'tis nothing. Take  
a cloth,

Bind it about mine arm. Nay, not so  
tight.

More softly, my good wife. And be not  
sad

I pray you be not sad. No: take it off.  
What matter if I bleed?

*(Tears bandage off.)*

Again! Again!

*(Simone disarms Guido.)*

My gentle lord, you see that I was right.  
My sword is better tempered, finer steel,  
But let us match our daggers.

B I A N C A *(to Guido)*

Kill him! kill him!

S I M O N E

Put out the torch, Bianca.

*(Bianca puts out torch.)*

Now, my good lord,  
Now to the death of one, or both of us,  
Or all the three it may be.

*(They fight.)*

There and there.

Ah! devil, do I hold thee in my gripe!

*(Simone overpowers Guido and throws  
him down on the floor.)*

G U I D O

Fool! take your strangling fingers from  
my throat.

I am my father's only son; the State  
Has but one heir, and that false enemy  
France

Waits for the ending of my father's line  
To fall upon our city.

S I M O N E

Hush! your father  
When he is childless will be happier.  
As for the State, I think our state of  
Florence  
Needs no adulterous pilot at its helm.  
Your life would soil its lilies.

G U I D O

Take off your hands.  
Take off your damnéd hands. Loose me,  
I say.

S I M O N E

Nay, you are caught in such a cunning vice



That nothing will avail you, and your life  
Narrowed into a single point of shame  
Ends with that shame and ends most  
shamefully.

GUIDO

Oh! let me have a priest before I die!

SIMONE

What would'st thou have a priest for?  
tell thy sins  
To God whom thou shalt see this very  
night  
And then no more for ever. Tell your  
sins  
To Him who is most just, being pitiless,  
Most pitiful being just. As for my-  
self . . .

GUIDO

Oh! help me, sweet Bianca! help me,  
Bianca,  
Thou knowest I am innocent of harm.

SIMONE

What! is there life yet in those lying  
lips?  
Die like a dog with lolling tongue! Die!  
Die!  
And the dumb river shall receive your  
corse  
And wash it all unheeded to the sea.

GUIDO

Lord Christ receive my wretched soul  
to-night.

SIMONE

Amen to that. Now for the other.

*(He dies. Simone rises and looks at  
Bianca. She comes towards him  
as one dazed with wonder and with  
outstretched arms.)*

BIANCA

Why  
Did you not tell me you were so strong?

SIMONE

Why  
Did you not tell me you were beautiful?  
*(He kisses her on the mouth.)*

CURTAIN



